Aide Denies President Was Aware of Bugging

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., April 23—President Nixon secluded himself in his Key Biscayne villa today, while a White House spokesman denied that Mr. Nixon had any prior knowledge of the Watergate bugging case.

Deputy press secretary Gerald Warren made the statement in response to a question that was based on the latest Gallup Poll, which showed that 41 per cent of the American people think the President "knew about the Watergate situation in advance." Another 32 per cent thought he did not know while the remaining persons either had no opinion or were ignorant about the Watergate.

Asked whether the President did in fact have advance knowledge, Warren replied:

"Of course not. He did not. No."

Warren appeared at the daily White House press briefing as a substitute for press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler who Warren said was busy with "other chores" assigned him by the President.

Ziegler is the senior White House staff aide with Mr. Nixon during his extended holiday visit to Key Biscayne in the absence of chief of staff H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, the President's domestic affairs adviser. Ziegler has not been available to the press for the past three days, and there were indications here that he was assuming a major staff role within the administration during the investigations into the Watergate case.

Warren denied, as Ziegler did four days ago, that Haldeman or other top White House aides have resigned or been removed from office.

But he would neither confirm nor deny a Washington Post story of today that President Nixon was warned as early as last December of the involvement of presidential aides in the Watergate case.

Instead, he referred reporters to the President's statement of six days ago, which he said was "very clear."

In that statement Mr. Nixon said he became aware of "serious charges" in the Watergate case on March 21 and, as a result, "began intensive new inquiries into this whole matter."

Since that time, Mr. Nixon has been spending much of his time closeted by himself or talking with people on the telephone. Warren declined to identify whom the President talked with today, a departure from the usual practice at White House briefings.

The deputy press secretary said he could not predict when the President would have any further statement on the Watergate.

But there is a growing belief here among the cadre of Nixon aides that a dramatic statement will soon be made by Mr. Nixon, perhaps in Washington later this week.

Warren said there were no plans of which he was aware for either Haldeman or Ehrlichman to fly to Key Biscayne. The two men spent the weekend and today at Camp David, the presidential retreat near Thurmont, Md.

Mr. Nixon returned at midday from Grand Cay in the Bahamas where he had spent the night after hearing an Easter sermon in which the Rev. John Huffman called upon members of the congregation to admit past mistakes and "fish or cut bait."

Warren was asked the President's opinion of the sermon and replied, "the President always enjoys Rev. Huffman's sermons."